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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CANBERRA 001041

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/ANP, WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2019

TAGS: [CU](#) [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [AS](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA ON LIBERTAD ACT AND FOREIGN MINISTER'S
VISIT TO CUBA

REF: SECSTATE 115416

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Edgard Kagan, Reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Australia wants to enhance engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean and sees improving its relationship with Cuba as a part of that strategy. In addition to signing a Memorandum of Understanding, which "will provide the future basis for cooperation and exchanges" between both countries, Foreign Minister Smith was to raise human rights concerns during his November 23 visit to Cuba. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Following is the response to reftel query about Australia's relations with Cuba, based on responses from John Wood, Assistant Secretary for Canada & Latin America at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as well as from GOA media releases. Australia complies with reftel stipulations for suspension of actions under Title III of the Libertad Act. Separately, discussion also covered Foreign Minister Stephen Smith's visit to Cuba on November 23.

Responses to Reftel

¶3. (SBU) Trade Relationship: According to DFAT's Market Information and Research Section, bilateral trade in goods for 2008 totaled approximately USD 12 million (USD 7.4 million in imports from Cuba -- mainly tobacco, crustaceans and rum; and USD 4.6 million in exports to Cuba -- mainly electrical circuits equipment and milk products). Australia has no trade in services and no investment relationship with Cuba. Among Cuba's principal export destinations in 2008, Australia ranked 37th, accounting for 0.2% of Cuban exports. Among Cuba's principal import sources in 2008, Australia ranked 49th, accounting for 0.1% of Cuban imports. According to Woods, Cuba has an outstanding debt to Australia of USD 9 million, plus about USD 30 million in accumulated interests (for agricultural equipment during the late 1980s).

¶4. (SBU) Diplomatic Visits: There have been two high-level diplomatic visits in the past six months: FM Smith on November 23 and a visit by Australian Deputy Representative to the UN, who was accompanied by DFAT's Wood and who also met with the Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. In July 2009, Australia hosted the first Australian Film Festival in Havana. There are no official exchange programs between Australia and Cuba.

15. (C) Support for Democracy and Human Rights: The GOA has voted in support of UN resolutions to end the U.S. trade embargo, but at the same time has expressed concern over Cuba's human rights record, multilaterally and bilaterally through: Non-support for NAM UNCHR resolutions targeting the Libertad Act; support for U.S. resolutions on Cuba's human rights record; and also raising human rights issues during periodic diplomatic representations.

Foreign Minister Smith's Visit

16. (SBU) Smith, who is the first Australian Foreign Minister to visit Cuba since 1995, met his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla and First Vice President Jose Machado Ventura. The visit coincided with the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and Cuba. Smith said he is, "Pleased with the way our relationship has progressed...in the last two years, we have worked more closely together in international organizations, particularly the UN."

17. (SBU) Smith signed a Memorandum of Understanding which "will provide the future basis for cooperation and exchanges" between both countries in fields of mutual interest such as "science, culture, sport and commerce." Smith specifically mentioned he explored with the Cubans how they could: 1) Work together through regional organizations such as the Rio Group and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); 2) Cooperate on health programs for development and capacity building in the Pacific and Caribbean (there are Cuban doctors and nurses currently

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working in several Pacific Island countries).

18. (C) Comment: Wood told us Smith would raise human rights during meetings with his Cuban counterparts. DFAT has not yet received a full readout from the visit and cannot yet comment on what was actually discussed. Australia wants to enhance engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean and sees improving its relationship with Cuba as an important component of that strategy. While Australia is against the U.S. embargo policy, it is of the view that as Australia seeks more engagement, it must also see more improvements in Cuba.

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